



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **JACKSON COUNTY NAMED “COMMUNITY OF THE YEAR” BY THE UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE RURAL DEVELOPMENT**

MARIANNA, FL, September 14, 2004 — The United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development today honored Jackson County as the 2004 winner of Florida’s “Rural Community of the Year” award. Jackson County was selected for its diligent and successful initiatives in sustainable community and economic development. “The residents and leaders of Jackson County are to be commended for their continuing efforts in building a viable sustainable community that serves its residents well,” said Charles W. Clemons, Sr., State Director USDA Rural Development.

Jackson County’s nomination for the award showcased the community’s long-term commitment and infrastructure initiatives that reflect overwhelming support of its residents. In 1822 when Jackson County became Florida's third county, there were no towns existing within the county. Today, Jackson County is a rural community offering business in agriculture, manufacturing, service, and retail trade. With an estimated population of 46,508, the county covers 916 square miles and borders the states of Alabama and Georgia. Jackson County has labored to improve the quality of life of its citizens, and with assistance from Rural Development, low income housing rehabilitation has been accomplished, water and waste disposal systems have been constructed and an increasing number of economic development opportunities have resulted.

Sustainability is a challenge facing communities in rural areas throughout the State of Florida, but Jackson County has responded by working toward achieving economic opportunity and quality of life for its residents. In addition to financial assistance provided by USDA Rural Development, the county has partnered with other federal and state agencies to bring improvements to the community. An example of this success is the State Road 71/US 90/I-10 Corridor Water and Wastewater Extension project that included partners from Rural Development, State of Florida, the Economic Development Administration, and private businesses. Rural Development’s \$3.5 million share of the \$6 million project helped bring over 700 new jobs to the area.

Today’s celebration also was marked by a ribbon cutting ceremony and dedication of the Jackson County Agricultural Conference Center. The 7,800 square foot conference center features a state-of-the-art auditorium with flexible seating arrangements designed to be

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sectioned off for concurrent use by groups, or as one large auditorium. The conference center will serve as training and meeting facility for use by various community organizations. In addition to county and state funds, Rural Development provided a \$900,000 Community Facility Loan to make the conference center possible.

State Director Clemons said, "I want to commend the leaders and the citizens of Jackson County for the many accomplishments that have been realized that benefit not only this county, but this region as well. Jackson County is an example of economic and community development occurring hand-in-hand, benefiting its residents economically, socially and culturally. Jackson County successfully demonstrates that size and limited resources are not barriers to accomplishing goals designed to improve the quality of life for its citizens and community."

The Rural Community of the Year Award is presented annually to recognize rural communities that have engaged in significant efforts to improve the quality of life of their citizens. Jackson County received a commemorative plaque from USDA Rural Development, reading: "2004 Rural Community Development Award acknowledges Jackson County as the Rural Community of the Year for outstanding achievements in carrying out a comprehensive program of sustainable community and economic development that has resulted in tangible improvements in the quality of life for its residents."

USDA Rural Development is committed to the future of rural communities and is the lead Federal entity for rural development needs and administers financial and technical assistance through Rural Housing Programs, Rural Business-Cooperative Programs and Rural Utilities Programs. Further information on USDA Rural Development can be obtained by contacting any USDA Service Center or by visiting USDA's web site at <http://www.rurdev.usda.gov/fl>

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